



File Code: 3420

Date: August 17, 2007

Lawrence Morrin
Regional Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
P.O. Box 26567
Albuquerque, NM 87125

Dear Mr. Morrin:

On August 8 & 9, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Steve Thomas (Jicarilla Agency) to evaluate a proposed FY 2008 dwarf mistletoe control project on the Jicarilla Apache Reservation. They also examined several other potential project areas (for years 2009 and beyond), and checked portions of a recently completed FY 2007 project area. Rick Wells (Jicarilla Agency) provided a tour of a planned timber sale area on Apache Mesa. This letter provides site and project descriptions, and includes our recommendations.

Stock Driveway

Treatment of five small units here totaling 79 acres, part of the FY 2007 project, has recently been completed. It appeared that the Tribal thinning crew did a good job selecting leave trees according to prescription. (The remainder of the 2007 project area—178 acres on Pounds Mesa—has also been completed; however, this area was not re-visited due to time constraints). Six additional Stock Driveway units totaling 158 acres, located north of the 2007 units, are proposed for treatment in FY 2008. This area was commercially harvested 5 to 6 years ago; follow-up treatment would remove mistletoe-infected and excess trees in the smaller size classes.

Each of the six proposed units is nearly pure ponderosa pine, with light to moderate dwarf mistletoe infestation. Understory stocking is highly variable, but exceeds 500 stems per acre in much of the area. Note that most under-stocked and severely-infested (essentially untreatable) areas have been excluded from the proposed acreage. Steve's follow-up prescriptions call for variable spacing, depending on size class, to retain about 40 ft² of total basal area/acre. We strongly support this silvicultural strategy (which entails closer spacing of the younger trees), since it provides good site utilization and allows for expected mortality over the length of the rotation. We recommend cutting all mistletoe-infested trees less than 5" dbh, while retaining the better lightly-infested ($DMR \leq 2$) larger trees, where needed.

Continental Divide

Three units here totaling 188 acres comprise the remainder of the Agency's FY 2008 proposal. These areas were examined by Dave and Steve last year (see our 3420 letter of June 27, 2006). Since then, slash from the 2005 commercial sale has been piled for burning this fall. Follow-up sanitation treatment would be conducted by the Tribal thinning crew next spring.



Telephone Ridge

This 402 acre area was commercially harvested in 2005, in part to address extensive dwarf mistletoe infestation. These stands are multi-storied ponderosa pine, with a significant component (roughly 10%) of Douglas-fir. Ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe has a typical patchy distribution, and appears to occur in about ½ of the total area. No Douglas-fir mistletoe was seen during our walkthrough/drive-through examination. The recent sale removed 50 to 60% of the original basal area, including most mistletoe-infected overstory trees. This area would tentatively be divided into two separate project areas (West and East Telephone) for follow-up sanitation-thinning in 2009 and 2010. This area would be a good candidate for treatment since the disease appears to be within manageable levels; Douglas fir would provide an “alternate species” for retention in many portions. The Agency will conduct post-harvest stand exams prior to submitting project proposals in order to better quantify current stocking, species composition, and mistletoe infection level.

Apache Mesa

A 517-acre area has been prepared and marked here for a potential sale, which the Agency hopes to offer within the next few months. These stands were last harvested around 1960 and presently have a mature overstory of pine sawtimber, and at least two significant younger cohorts. Douglas-fir is present as a minor component. Pine dwarf mistletoe occurs in roughly half the total area, and is moderate overall. Present basal areas average about 85 ft², but easily exceed 120 ft² in some areas. A significant amount of western pine beetle activity has occurred within the past few years.

The sale is marked to remove almost all of the mistletoe infected overstory trees and retain overstory basal areas of approximately 30 ft² in most areas. Assuming this area is harvested as planned, the Agency would propose follow-up sanitation-thinning to remove diseased and excess trees in the smaller size classes (tentatively in 2011—2012, after the Telephone Ridge project).

A stand north of this sale area and adjacent to the El Poso mistletoe control project area (treated in the late 1980s) was also examined as a potential project site. This area, about 80 acres in size, does not have enough volume for a viable commercial sale, but is overstocked in small pine sawtimber, poles, and saplings. Dwarf mistletoe is light and very patchy in distribution. This stand could clearly benefit from a non-commercial entry to improve growth and reduce disease spread and impact. This area may serve as an “alternative” future project site if the above timber sale cannot be implemented.

Conclusions

We commend the Jicarilla Agency for their excellent FY 2008 project proposal and continued commitment to forest health. The proposed project should reduce long-term impacts from dwarf mistletoe, increase growth on selected crop trees, and improve overall forest conditions. We are especially pleased to assist with development of future projects at Jicarilla.

Please contact Dave Conklin at (505) 842-3288 if you have questions about this evaluation.

Sincerely,

/s/ Debra Allen-Reid

DEBRA ALLEN-REID

New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc: Steve Thomas (Jicarilla Agency, BIA), John Waconda (Southwest Regional Office, BIA),
Gilbert Zepeda